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AUTHOR Grant, Carmen Hill
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ABSTRACT

Several works have suggested that life proceeds in a pattern of developmental stages characterized by expansion during the early adult years and restriction, or withdrawal, after middle age. Postulating that self-concept might also be expected to reflect this curvilinear pattern of life stages, the author explored differences in adult self-concept measures across age levels. This study assesses the self-concepts of a cross-sectional sample of 500 adults in five age groups, using the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale and Forms A and B of the 16 PF Personality Factor Questionnaire. The results support a general life-stages model of change, but the pattern is not a uniform expansion-restriction one for all factors. The self-concept changes suggest a complex pattern which may be, in part, a function of socioeconomic status, age, and social roles. Wide variability is probably attributable to individual differences. The feelings a person reports about himself tend to become more positive with age, with crisis periods experienced in the 30's and 50's. Socioeconomic status affects reported self-concept feelings and apparently masks some areas of concern. How one views himself may be as dependent upon how one perceives his role in life as upon his age. (Author/NMF)

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AGE DIFFERENCES IN SELF-CONCEPT FROM EARLY ADULTHOOD THROUGH OLD AGE[1]

Carmen Hill Grant
University Health Center
University of Nebraska

Despite the diversity of opinion regarding its significance, the psychological concept of self has found a definite place in most modern theories of personality. The present study was designed to explore the extent to which evaluations that adults hold about themselves change with age.

The work of Allport (1961), Buhler (1961), Kuhlen (1963), Schaie (1962), and Cumming and Henry (1961) all suggest that life proceeds in a pattern of developmental stages characterized by expansion during the early adult years and restriction or withdrawal after middle age is reached. Postulating that self-concept also might be expected to reflect this curvilinear pattern of life stages, the author explored such differences in adult self-concept measures across age levels. A life-stages model of the expansion-restriction type was chosen over others because it seemed compatible both with the theoretical views and empirical data from the specific area of self-concept and personality development, in general.

In order to explore the validity of this theory, however, it was desirable first to determine the factorial structure of the in-

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strument used to assess the self-concept, namely, the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS). (Fitts, 1965) Self-concept in this study was defined as an individual's conscious description of himself as measured by his endorsement on the TSCS.

METHOD

The study involved a cross-sectional sampling of five adult age groups, and comparisons between these groups on self-concept factors identified through the factor analytic approach.

Subjects

Five hundred volunteer Ss from church groups were administered a 13-item personal data form, the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (100 items), and Forms A and B of Cattell's (Cattell & Stice 1963) 16PF Personality Factor Questionnaire (32 scales). The Ss ranged in age 20-69; there were 250 women, 250 men. The total sample was subdivided into five age groups: 20-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; and 60-69.

Procedure

Data was collected from Ss at a group meeting arranged through each church's pastor or religious educator. None of the questionnaires were timed tests. The Ss were allowed to work at their own pace, although intermittently reminded to answer quickly and to give first impressions. In instances where the necessity of age required, Ss were allowed to complete the questionnaires at home.

RESULTS

Scores for all 500 Ss on the 145 variables were punched on IBM cards for computation on the IBM 7040. Pearson product-moment inter-

correlations of all variables resulted in a 145 X 145 correlation matrix which was factor analyzed by the principal axis method. Fifteen factors, accounting for 44% of the total variance, were extracted then rotated to a varimax solution in order to both facilitate the psychological interpretation of the factor solution and explore the relationship of results to the life-stages model under study.

The 15 factors extracted and identified were: I-negative self-concept, II-emotional warmth, III-emotional insecurity, IV-socioeconomic status, V-masculinity, VI-self-satisfaction, VII-concern with personal irresponsibility, VIII-life satisfaction, IX-mobility, X-family alienation, XI-passivity, XII-physical illness complaints, XIII-satisfaction with personal appearance, XIV-denial, and XV-social insecurity.

Weighted factor scores for each S were electronically computed for each of the 15 factors. Then 15 separate analyses of variance were done, with age and sex as the independent variables and each of the 15 factor scores as the dependent variable. Factor IV, which was a socioeconomic factor, revealed significant age and sex differences. Consequently, 14 additional analyses of covariance were computed, with Factor IV as the covariance control variable.

CONCLUSIONS

The results rather clearly indicate that self-concept is a multidimensional trait and that people's feelings about themselves do change, and to some extent, as a function of the maturing process. The results do offer support for a general life-stages model of change, although the pattern is not a uniform expansion-restriction

one for all factors. Rather, the changes revealed suggest a complex pattern which in part may be a function of socioeconomic status, age, and social roles.

While much variance was accounted for by the present factors, a great deal of variability still remains unaccounted for, much of which is probably attributable to individual differences. Therefore, one should interpret the present results as indices of group trends.

The most general finding was that the feelings which a person reports about himself tend to become more positive with age. This result seems consistent with the view that aging involves a voluntary withdrawal and is perceived by many as a desirable stage in life. However, the significant age, sex, and interaction effects on Factor XIV (denial) raise the possibility of a different interpretation. It may well be that the increase shown in the reported self-concept with age is the result of an increase in the tendency toward denial rather than any increase in actual positive feeling about the self. One could also interpret this finding as confirmation of a need to expand continually one's horizons. There are sex differences also which suggest that men react to aging somewhat differently than do women. Specifically, men across all age levels tend more so than women toward denial and preservation of positive self-images.

The findings on Factors II and VII suggest that the 30s and 50s are experienced as crisis periods during the adult years, with feelings of insecurity and concerns about personal behavior prominent. Concern along these particular dimensions is also highly related to the sex of the respondent. Women consistently report feeling more insecure than men, but less concerned about whether their behavior

le moral and responsible. While women and men reported similar reactions to the overall process of aging, they apparently perceived life somewhat differently as a result of their sex and of the different roles in which society places them. The relationship between self-concept, role behavior, and personality development suggested by these findings warrants further investigation.

Additional support for a life-stages theory may be seen from the analysis of Factor X. Reported feelings of alienation from one's family are higher in the 30-39 year group than for any other period in the life span. This relationship seems consistent with Buhler's and Kuhlen's findings that by the 30s most people have married, are establishing homes and families of their own, and are actively striving for career success. It seems likely that during the 20s family ties are closest because many individuals are either still in school or are just starting a job, and are still emotionally dependent to some extent upon their parents.

That the older one gets the greater the tendency to express physical complaints seems to follow naturally occurring events in life. As aging progresses, limitations in physical abilities emerge. This is particularly true of those people in the older age groups. Thus, these findings on Factor XII seem consistent with other research data.

Two findings from the present study emerged to suggest that socioeconomic status effects the way in which an individual responds to questions about self-related feelings. In both Factors II and XV (emotional warmth and social insecurity) significant differences appeared in the analysis of variance, but not covariance. These results suggest the possibility that different value systems are involved

in the way an individual finds means of self-expression and that these values are closely related to one's social class.

The second finding of interest was the apparent masking effect of socioeconomic status on the following factors: emotional insecurity, concern with personal irresponsibility, and family alienation. Judging from the direction of the mean scores and the intercorrelations between factor scores, it appears that middle-class values influenced the manner in which an individual expressed his feelings. That is, neither the high nor low scores were probably as high or as low as they would have been if socioeconomic class values had not been interfering with their expression. This masking effect clouds the meaning of the significant age difference found for each of these factors, and at the same time, suggests the importance of social variables in the expression of attitudes about the self.

The results of the present study have further implications beyond developmental change with age. Sex also appears to play an important role in one's reported self-evaluation. Men were seen to report more assertive feelings, more feelings of dissatisfaction with life, and more desire to change life patterns. Furthermore, men tended to report themselves as calmer and more stable than women, and more concerned about the moral aspects of their bahavior. At the same time, it is interesting to note that men tended toward denial of faults and weaknesses more than women, a finding which could be interpreted as a reflection of role expectations within American society. Again, these results suggest that how one views himself (or herself) may be as dependent upon how one perceives his role in life as to how old he or she is.

Although age is undoubtedly a significant variable in explaining the present findings, one must also recognize that there are cultural variables equally or more influential in effecting some of the age differences reported. The determination of such factors was not within the scope of this study.

The next step in continuing the present line of research would involve a follow-up study of the present sample to include a different classification and scoring system for the TSCS, dependent upon the establishment of a more complete factorial structure. By using a cross-sequential design as developed by Schaie (1965), one would then be able to investigate more carefully the developmental patterns of adult self-concept.

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Table 1

Means and Ratios for Analyses of Variance
and Covariance of Factor Scores

Total N = 500

Age - Sex N = 50 Total Age N = 100 Total Sex N = 250

Factor I - Negative Self-Concept

	Mean				F Anal.	F Anal.
Age Group	Men	Women	Total	Source	Var.	Covar.
20-29	49.86	51.43	50.64	Age	3.20*	5.89***
30-39	51.77	52.54	52.15	Sex	1.50	3.42
40-49	48.96	49.69	49.32	AXS	2.77*	2.89*
50-59	51.78	47.16	49.47			
60-69	49.82	46.89	48.35			
Total	50.44	49.54	49.99			

Factor II - Emotional Warmth

	Mean				F Anal.	F Anal.
Age Group	Men	Women	Total	Source	Var.	Covar.
20-29	50.82	50.80	50.81	Age	6.35***	1.34
30-39	52.13	50.69	51.41	Sex	.09	1.88
40-49	51.84	51.20	51.52	AXS	1.07	1.13
50-59	47.18	49.45	48.31			
60-69	47.59	48.33	47.96			
Total	49.91	50.09	50.00			

Factor III - Emotional Insecurity

	Mean				F Anal.	F Anal.
Age Group	Men	Women	Total	Source	Var.	Covar.
20-29	46.64	51.57	49.11	Age	1.96	5.08***
30-39	49.36	53.59	51.48	Sex	16.32***	9.85**
40-49	47.28	50.99	49.14	AXS	.80	.85
50-59	50.79	51.60	51.20			
60-69	47.78	50.35	49.06			
Total	48.37	51.62	49.99			

* = significant at .05 level
** = significant at .01 level
*** = significant at .001 level

Table 1 cont'd

Factor IV (Lower) Socioeconomic Status

Age Group	Mean Men	Mean Women	Mean Total	Source	F Anal. Var.	F Anal. Covar.
20-29	48.45	49.77	49.11	Age	24.92***	
30-39	47.08	48.75	47.91	Sex	11.19***	
40-49	48.27	48.91	48.59	AXS	.49	
50-59	50.73	51.52	51.13			
60-69	52.81	54.33	53.27			
Total	49.35	50.66	50.00			

Factor V - Masculinity

Age Group	Mean Men	Mean Women	Mean Total	Source	F Anal. Var.	F Anal. Covar.
20-29	54.55	47.37	50.96	Age	6.75***	16.83***
30-39	53.42	46.90	50.16	Sex	79.66***	999.19***
40-49	53.83	46.49	50.16	AXS	.36	.27
50-59	52.46	45.62	49.04			
60-69	53.03	46.26	49.64			
Total	53.46	46.53	49.99			

Factor VI - Self Satisfaction

Age Group	Mean Men	Mean Women	Mean Total	Source	F Anal. Var.	F Anal. Covar.
20-29	49.64	50.76	50.20	Age	.83	1.69
30-39	49.35	49.58	49.46	Sex	2.02	3.43
40-49	49.93	50.36	50.14	AXS	.86	.76
50-59	47.97	50.76	49.36			
60-69	51.02	50.63	50.83			
Total	49.58	50.42	49.99			

Factor VII - Concern with Personal Irresponsibility

Age Group	Mean Men	Mean Women	Mean Total	Source	F Anal. Var.	F Anal. Covar.
20-29	50.23	49.13	49.68	Age	1.17	2.41*
30-39	52.25	50.05	51.15	Sex	12.87***	19.18***
40-49	49.59	48.28	48.93	AXS	.70	.83
50-59	52.14	48.36	50.25			
60-69	51.76	48.19	49.97			
Total	51.19	48.80	49.99			

Table 1 cont'd

Factor VIII - Life Satisfaction

Age Group	Mean Men	Mean Women	Mean Total	Source	F Anal. Var.	F Anal. Covar.
20-29	49.83	50.64	50.23	Age	.48	.78
30-39	49.64	50.35	49.99	Sex	7.84**	11.08***
40-49	49.72	50.55	50.13	AXS	.37	.29
50-59	48.49	50.37	49.63			
60-69	49.91	50.26	50.08			
Total	49.60	50.43	50.02			

Factor IX - Mobility

Age Group	Mean Men	Mean Women	Mean Total	Source	F Anal. Var.	F Anal. Covar.
20-29	54.11	53.03	53.57	Age	192.95***	163.87***
30-39	52.29	50.33	51.31	Sex	43.75***	37.28***
40-49	50.27	49.38	49.82	AXS	1.94	1.99
50-59	48.54	47.55	48.04			
60-69	47.51	46.92	47.22			
Total	50.54	49.44	49.99			

Factor X - Family Alienation

Age Group	Mean Men	Mean Women	Mean Total	Source	F Anal. Var.	F Anal. Covar.
20-29	49.35	49.02	49.19	Age	1.72	3.97**
30-39	50.61	51.39	51.00	Sex	.92	2.87
40-49	49.55	50.70	50.13	AXS	1.76	1.95
50-59	51.49	49.19	50.34			
60-69	50.20	48.47	49.33			
Total	50.24	49.76	49.99			

Factor XI - Passivity

Age Group	Mean Men	Mean Women	Mean Total	Source	F Anal. Var.	F Anal. Covar.
20-29	48.30	51.79	50.04	Age	2.53*	3.43**
30-39	47.72	50.93	49.33	Sex	70.93***	58.36***
40-49	48.96	50.90	49.93	AXS	3.78*	4.61**
50-59	50.04	51.19	50.61			
60-69	49.52	50.61	50.06			
Total	48.91	51.08	49.99			

Table 1 cont'd

Factor XII - Physical Illness Complaints

Age Group	Mean Men	Mean Women	Mean Total	Source	F Anal. Var.	F Anal. Covar.
20-20	48.03	49.23	48.63	Age	5.95***	2.43*
30-39	49.21	50.14	49.68	Sex	3.28	.28
40-49	48.83	50.32	49.57	AXS	.71	1.16
50-59	50.91	50.88	50.89			
60-69	51.25	51.15	51.20			
Total	49.65	50.34	49.99			

Factor XIII - Physical Appearance - Satisfaction

Age Group	Mean Men	Mean Women	Mean Total	Source	F Anal. Var.	F Anal. Covar.
20-29	50.21	49.73	49.97	Age	.85	1.38
30-39	49.49	49.62	49.55	Sex	.15	.51
40-49	50.53	50.12	50.32	AXS	.71	.74
50-59	49.40	50.34	49.87			
60-69	50.09	50.53	50.31			
Total	49.94	50.07	50.01			

Factor XIV - Denial

Age Group	Mean Men	Mean Women	Mean Total	Source	F Anal Var.	F Anal. Covar.
20-29	49.79	47.71	48.75	Age	32.28***	17.53***
30-39	48.28	46.55	47.41	Sex	5.38*	10.62**
40-49	49.79	48.45	49.12	AXS	2.08	2.38*
50-59	50.32	51.38	50.85			
60-69	54.07	53.64	53.86			
Total	50.45	49.54	49.99			

Factor XV - Social Insecurity

Age Group	Mean Men	Mean Women	Mean Total	Source	F Anal. Var.	F Anal. Covar.
20-29	48.56	50.28	49.42	Age	1.45	1.80
30-39	49.33	50.87	50.10	Sex	8.35**	3.25
40-49	48.74	50.28	49.51	AXS	.82	.85
50-59	50.72	50.50	50.61			
60-69	49.84	50.94	50.39			
Total	49.44	50.57	50.01			